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SUBJECT: Special Media Reaction: E.U. Ban on LTTE Travel

1. (U) Summary: The Sri Lankan media reacted strongly to the European Union's travel ban on the LTTE. Mainstream and Sinhala nationalist media led with news of the ban, praising the move and speculating the decision could lead quickly to the EU's designation of the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). The Tamil and pro-LTTE press, conversely, criticized the travel ban and highlighted LTTE political wing leader S. Tamilselvan's stern warning that it would negatively affect the peace process. End Summary.

2. (U) English and Sinhala media led September 28 with reports of the EU's ban on travel to the EU by the LTTE, and the next day published reaction statements from the Sinhala nationalist parties Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) praising the ban and calling for the immediate designation of the LTTE as a terrorist organization in all European countries. The Sinhala nationalist press alleged "pro-Tiger" Norway had failed to influence the EU decision despite hard lobbying. The mainstream Daily Mirror was the only English paper to prominently publish the LTTE's response to the EU travel ban. It reported Tiger political wing leader S. Tamilselvan saying September 28 at a press conference in Kilinochchi: "While the EU decision gives into the sinister motives of the government it also scuttles the stability of peace moves in Sri Lanka."

3. (U) English and Sinhala language editorialists also focused on the issue. Government owned Daily News praised the "long overdue" EU travel ban on the LTTE and contended the EU should also ban suspected LTTE fund-raising organizations operating there, stopping short of naming the controversial Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO). The Daily News editor wrote, "Our position should not be seen as synonymous with the chauvinistic elements of Southern Sri Lanka, which are strongly resisting our efforts to solve our ethnic conflict by peaceful means. Rather we are in perfect agreement with the Co-Chairs who are calling on the LTTE to demonstrate their peaceful intentions, if any. A moral obligation is cast on the global community. to bring the LTTE to the negotiating table." Mainstream independent (though pro-UNP) Daily Mirror welcomed the ban, saying it "serves the cause of democracy and human rights that they seek to promote throughout the world." The Mirror also called Sinhala nationalist forces to task, stating, "The greater responsibility devolves on the majority Sinhala community and their leaders. They should realize it had been the reluctance on their part, particularly those who have given leadership to extremist sections, to insure justice and equality to minorities that gave birth to separatist and terrorist movements." The Sinhala nationalist Island called for "Three cheers for a declaration!" and contended the EU ban means "the LTTE can no longer justify terror on any grounds."

4. (U) The Sinhala sister papers of the English dailies editorialized much the same way, whereas the independent Lakbima (note: no English counterpart paper) made a more negative argument, comparing the alleged lethargic attitude of the West on terrorism before September 11 to the international community's repeated insistence now that the LTTE give up terrorism and join the democratic process.

5. (U) Pro-LTTE English and independent Tamil newspapers carried messages from the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and several international Tamil organizations condemning the EU decision and featuring Tamilselvan's comments on the matter. Independent Thinakkural bannered, "Peace process will be badly affected," while mainstream independent Virakesari led with, "EU ban shocks LTTE." The pro-LTTE Tamil Net web site ran a more measured headline, saying: "Tamilselvan urges EU to reconsider stand on LTTE." Flagship Tamil newspaper Virakesari editorialized the EU was attempting to "disturb the peace," arguing the ban would encourage Sinhala Buddhist extremists to further repress the rights of Tamils. Pro-LTTE Sudar Oli criticized the decision as biased towards the Sri Lankan government, and

proposed that all Tamil associations in the EU organize peaceful demonstrations.

16. (SBU) Comment: The Sri Lankan media reacted predictably to news of the E.U. ban on travel. English and Sinhala press responded very positively to the E.U. decision but called upon the international community to continue to intervene for the success of the peace process. The Sinhala press resisted its usual proclivity for lashing out in aggressive phrasing against the LTTE, instead praising the move while hoping for an EU FTO ban as well. The U.K.'s Tony Blair, with his country holding the EU presidency, received credit for the ban and for allegedly bypassing purported Norwegian objections. The Tamil press played the victim card, blaming the Sri Lankan government for unfairly biasing the international community against the Tamil struggle in an underhanded move, and hinting at a return to violence if these moves continued. We will continue to monitor Sri Lankan media reaction to events affecting the peace process. End Comment.

Lunstead